

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAB-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00
NSCE-00 SSO-00 ICAE-00 INRE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /055 W
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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PEPR, PINT
SUBJECT: ESCOBAR ON NEUTRALITY TREATIES AND PARTIES

SUMMARY. ROMULO ESCOBAR BETHANCOURT APPARENTLY HEWED CLOSELY TO THE GOVERNMENT LINE OF WAIT-AND-SEE AT A PUBLIC MEETING ON THE TREATIES SPONSORED BY A PANAMANIAN BUSINESS ORGANIZATION. END SUMMARY.

1. ROMULO ESCOBAR BETHANCOURT, FORMER CHIEF PANAMANIAN NEGOTIATOR PARTICIPATED IN A PUBLIC DISCUSSION APRIL 6, ALONG WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF FOUR POLITICAL GROUPINGS -- THE LIBERAL PARTY, THE PANAMENISTA PARTY, THE INDEPENDENT DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (POLITICAL ARM OF THE INDEPENDENT LAWYERS MOVEMENT) AND THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS SOME 100 PERSONS ATTENDED THE CONFERENCE, WHICH WAS SPONSORED BY THE PANAMANIAN BUSINESS EXECUTIVES ASSOCIATION (APEDE).

2. ESCOBAR SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD CARRY OUT AN EXTENSIVE "CONSULTATION" WITH THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE IN ORDER TO DETERMINE ITS POSITION ON THE TREATIES, AFTER THEY HAVE BEEN APPROVED BY THE UNITED STATES SENATE. HE SAID THAT SUCH CONSULTATION MIGHT INCLUDE
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A NEW PLEBISCITE.

3. ESCOBAR, IN ANSWER TO A QUESTION, SAID THAT HIS MARCH 16 STATEMENT THAT THE TREATIES WERE "POTABLE" WAS NOT MADE HASTILY, BUT HE NEVERTHELESS SAID THAT THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE UP ITS MIND ON THE TREATIES ONLY AFTER SENATE APPROVAL.

4. ESCOBAR SAID THAT THE POLITICAL PARTIES WERE DREAMING IF THEY THOUGHT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD RETURN TO THE "CORRUPT" POLITICAL PARTY DOMINATION WHICH EXISTED PRIOR TO 1968. HE SAID THERE WOULD BE NO DECREE TO LEGALIZE THE PARTIES BEFORE THE AUGUST ELECTIONS. BUT HE SUGGESTED THAT AFTER AUGUST A NEW POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM MIGHT BE DRAWN UP TO PROVIDE FOR PARTY PARTICIPATION, BUT IN THE CONTEXT OF CURRENT POLITICAL REALITIES (PRESUMABLY INCLUDING NATIONAL GUARD DOMINANCE OF THE GOVERNMENT).

5. THE NON-GOVERNMENT POLITICIANS ROUNDLY ZAPPED THE GOVERNMENT AND THE TREATIES. THE MOST MODERATE STATEMENT WAS BY DAVID SAMUDIO, PRESIDENT OF THE LIBERAL PARTY. HE REITERATED THE PARTY'S POSITION AGAINST THE NEUTRALITY TREATY AS AMENDED. UNLIKE THE OTHER PARTY POLITICAL SPOKESMEN, HE DID NOT ASK FOR AN IMMEDIATE RETURN TO A PARTY-BASED PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM, BUT RATHER SUGGESTED REFORMS WHICH WOULD LEAD ULTIMATELY TO SUCH A SYSTEM. ONE OF HIS SUGGESTIONS WAS FOR POPULAR ELECTION OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, WHICH IS NOW APPOINTIVE.

6. WE UNDERSTAND THE CONFERENCE WAS FILMED AND WILL BE SHOWN ON LOCAL TV APRIL 11.
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7. COMMENT: THOUGH ESCOBAR DID NOT SAY SO, HIS "POTABLE" STATEMENT IS CLEARLY "INOPERATIVE AT THIS POINT IN TIME". ON THE OTHER HAND, HE LEFT THE GOVERNMENT'S OPTIONS OPEN, AS TO ITS ULTIMATE DECISION.

8. SUBSEQUENT TO PREPARATION OF FOREGOING MESSAGE, FOREIGN MINISTRY RELEASED ITS COMMUNIQUE ON PRESS REPORTS REGARDING TORRIJOS LETTER TO OTHER CHIEFS OF GOVERNMENT (PANAMA 2346). FOLLOWING SENTENCE IS AN EXCERPT FROM AN ACAN/EFE WIRE SERVICE ITEM REPORTING THIS COMMUNIQUE AND AN INTERVIEW WITH ESCOBAR FILED FROM PANAMA THIS AFTERNOON: BEGINQUOTE: ESCOBAR TOLD ACAN/EFE THAT THE MESSAGE FORWARDED TO FOREIGN GOVERNMENTS EXPLAINED PANAMA'S "POSITION IN PRINCIPLE" ON U.S. RATIFICATION WITHOUT YET DEFINITELY REJECTING THE AMENDMENTS" (FBIS/ PANAMA PA 072115Y). AS OF 1700 APRIL 7, GOP COMMUNIQUE WAS PUBLISHED WITHOUT PARTICULAR COMMENT IN AFTERNOON "LA REPUBLICA", BUT THERE HAS BEEN NO FURTHER LOCAL BROADCAST OR PRESS MEDIA COVERAGE OF THIS OR ANY OTHER STATEMENTS TODAY BY ESCOBAR.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AGREEMENTS, TREATY RATIFICATION, MEETINGS, BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS, CANALS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 07 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978PANAMA02381
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780151-0517
Format: TEL
From: PANAMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
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ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780481/aaaacqmp.tel
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Review Exemptions: n/a
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TAGS: PEPR, PINT, PN, US, (ESCOBAR BETHANCOURT, ROMULO)
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